

Saratoga County Reopening Advisory Group Minutes  
May 27, 2020 – 3:00 p.m.

Chairman Lawler called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance in person and on the phone.

Ms. Duncan said that there are currently 464 cases, one more hospitalization as of yesterday for a total of 5, and 15 deaths. Mr. Lawler said that one of the 5 hospitalized is on a ventilator. Things have flattened out for them and at this point in time they are taking every opportunity to get the contact tracers trained into the new Comm Care system, which is the software they will use. This will allow for the hiring of contact tracers who will be able to work from home so if there is a surge in numbers then they can be put to work right in their homes and can communicate through the software with those in the Command Center. Ms. Duncan said that she participated in an environmental call this morning and a question was brought up regarding outdoor dining. Ms. Duncan said that outdoor dining is currently not allowed, take out only is allowed. Outdoor dining would need to be in accordance with State sanitary code, local code enforcement and would need to also have social distancing. Mr. Kinowski said that there seems to be a lot of confusion regarding take out, people are doing take out and then bringing it to picnics, parks, etc. Mr. Kinowski said that he posed this question to ESD. The answer is that take out cannot be consumed on the restaurants' premises. However people can still order take out and eat their food elsewhere, such as a picnic table, or picnic on a lawn. Mr. Wait added that it seems ironic that the picnic tables at the State Park are full, and yet restaurants, that contribute to the taxes that keep the park open, cannot open for outdoor dining. Mr. Lawler said that this is an area that is incomplete in terms of input and guidance from the State.

Mr. Hellwig provided an update from the Control Room. The Control Room continues to watch the metrics daily. There is currently no visible threat to the metrics at this point. A question was raised regarding motor sports, as Watkins Glen was allowed to open recently without fans. They are still waiting for guidance on that. Questions regarding graduation ceremonies comes up daily, there is nothing final on this yet. The County workforce is still at 50% as are other Governmental operations. There have been no changes announced regarding that as of today. Regarding Phase 2 guidance, this is scheduled to be released this afternoon. This is an ongoing conversation as businesses are in the process of trying to plan, and without the guidance, it makes it difficult or impossible for them to move forward. This point was clearly made today by several regional representatives. As an overview, Phase 2 includes Professional Services, Retail, Administrative Support, Real Estate Rental and Leasing. The current date that Phase 2 is expected to begin is June 3<sup>rd</sup>. Mr. Wait expressed his thanks to Mr. Hellwig for his quick and thorough response to questions. Mr. Wait asked if there was any notion of what the tax impact on the County will be at this point. Mr. Hellwig said that the most recent projections were shared with the Board last week, based on a number of sources such as NYSAC, but the actual tax receipts in May which represent March activities were down 26% which translates into \$33.5M that would be split between the Counties, Towns and Cities that share the sales tax formula. Saratoga County has already initiated steps to reduce spending, some cuts were made to this year's capital projects. The Departments were notified in March when this all began that there was an expectation to scale everything back because of the unpredictability of what we were

dealing with. This is indirect to the County as a whole, but it was our attempt to reduce the impact on the residents and taxpayers. The best and worst case scenarios ranged from \$20M to \$30M and we are beyond that right now. Mr. Lawler said that Mr. Hellwig participates in the call daily at 2pm. As questions have come in from the business community, we are able to get them in front of State level decision makers and get answers back quickly.

Mr. Hellwig said that the April sales tax receipts will come in as two payments, one in the beginning of June and one mid-June. Once both are received the distribution is done with the Towns.

Mr. Lawler said that it was decided as a group that an allocation of \$50K from the County would be a good idea, to support promotion of the County website and other advertising and promotion efforts that would help our business community recover. The mission of this group, as he sees it, is to help the business community to re-open and reestablish their businesses as efficiently, quickly and safely as possible. Mr. Lawler said that in that regard he was very disappointed to see an article in today's online edition of the Times Union criticizing that effort before it's even begun and before any details have been agreed upon, before the allocation, the request for the allocation was even presented at the Economic Development committee or before it was even presented to the Law and Finance Committee or before it was presented to the full Board for approval. Mr. Lawler said that it's difficult to have plans, formulate ideas, work on projects when those efforts are criticized when frankly they are in their most formative stages. Mr. Lawler said regardless of that criticism he still feels that it is important to move forward. Mr. Lawler said that to a great extent our communities live and die by our sales tax proceeds, just as this County's financial wherewithal is heavily influenced by sales tax receipts. Sales tax receipts are driven by business activity, which has ground to a near halt in Saratoga County. Mr. Lawler said that he believes any effort that helps the business community to re-establish itself, under the guidelines of quickly, efficiently and safely, can benefit not only the businesses, but every single resident of this County. It is in our best interest to help businesses that are struggling, some of which are barely hanging on. Mr. Lawler said that the County allocates \$375K per year for the Chamber to advertise our tourism programs, and believes that an allocation of \$50K to help our business community recover from the greatest disaster many of them have ever experienced is not unreasonable at all. The Chamber has offered to do it without any cost for the effort to do so. If the Board of Supervisors decides to allocate the \$50K, every nickel of that will go towards helping the business community.

Mr. Shimkus distributed a handout that was just finalized in the last hour. A copy of the handout is attached to these minutes. Mr. Shimkus said that it makes sense that the portal be provided on the County's website so that every business in the County will have access to the information.

Mr. Shimkus said that Mr. Hellwig has been a tremendous ally for the Chamber for the questions he has received.

The goal is to drive businesses to the County's reopening website and to also let consumers, visitors, residents know that Saratoga County is open for business again. Mr. Shimkus said a campaign will drive business to the County's website, improve its ratings which will attract even more people. The handout lists the best practices on how they intend to achieve this, this practice is similar to their tourism campaign. Ad locations can be monitored and changed for effectiveness, and geos can be expanded or contracted as the phases change. Mr. Lawler said that not only can this website provide the information for businesses to be able to re-open safely, but it can also promote to residents and consumers which types business are open as the phases

change, and that it's safe, as all of the businesses have a safety plan to protect them as well as their customers. Mr. Lawler said that he believes this will help businesses move quickly into a stronger recovery if people know that the business community is open and ready to do business. Mr. Shimkus gave an example of the fact that it was just announced this week that the Governor has allowed Veterinarians to open, however they are still receiving questions from Vets. if they can open. Veterinarians did not have any time to let their customers know because it was sprung on them. Mr. Lawler thanked Mr. Shimkus, and thanked Supervisor Connolly for the social media help he has provided and his collaboration with Mr. Shimkus, Mr. Rose and Mr. Mauro.

Mr. Rose and Mr. Mauro displayed the current website and gave an overview. The website can be found at [www.saratogacountyny.gov/county-reopening](http://www.saratogacountyny.gov/county-reopening). Mr. Rose said that they sat down with some website representatives from the Chamber, Adirondack Trust and Stewarts. They received a lot of feedback regarding formatting and layout, tips on abandonment rates. The website will continue to be updated and tweaked. Mr. Lawler thanked Mr. Rose, Mr. Mauro, the Chamber, Adirondack, Stewarts and Supervisor Connolly for the work and input provided on creating this website. Ideas and suggestions can be emailed and are encouraged. Mr. Wait suggested adding text to the banner of phases on the website that would include the earliest possible date of each phase opening. Mr. Wait suggested also focusing on Health as part of the promotional message as it has always been part of Saratoga's history. There is so much open space in Saratoga, to somehow encourage people to enjoy the outdoors. Mr. Kinowski also suggested tapping into the various school systems to distribute information.

Mr. Shimkus said that they have already ordered ribbon that states "Stronger Together Saratoga County". They have ordered enough for every business in the County to be able to do a ribbon cutting. They also have yard signs that will have the Stronger Together logo for each community. The idea is to pick a spot in each of the communities for businesses to be able to pick up ribbon and lawn signs, pick one day, same time, to have a coordinated ribbon cutting across Saratoga County. A large re-opening ribbon cutting ceremony (date TBD) to symbolize the fact that our economy is open for business.

Mr. Lawler opened up the meeting for any further questions or discussion.

Ms. Gaston said that she remains in opposition because she has not received an answer from the committee regarding the funding. Ms. Gaston said that she does support local businesses and has been doing so. She has personally delivered masks and discussed reopening with businesses and advised them to seek the website. Ms. Gaston said that she is hearing from constituents that they are not willing to go to businesses once they are reopened unless we are engaging in the proper public health education and steps. This is where her concern comes from as she is hearing a lot of discussion about the businesses, but not who is going to support them. Ms. Gaston said that she would like to see businesses all around the county to remain open and to thrive, but if customers don't come, and if businesses are paying for their employees, they are going to end up in a potentially worse state than they are in.

Mr. Lawler said that he apologizes for Ms. Gaston not having received an answer from this committee to the email that she sent to him this morning. He said that he thought it would be better for a response from this committee to be made to Ms. Gaston after the Committee actually had an opportunity to talk about it. Mr. Lawler again apologized for not being more quick to answer the

email that Ms. Gaston sent to him mid-morning today but he didn't have to worry about it because he was able to read much of the email in today's Times Union.

Mr. Lawler said that he was unsure of how much of the previous conversation Ms. Gaston had listened to but they talked about the importance of safety and the mission being to help businesses to open as quickly, efficiently and safely as possible. They believe it is very important that businesses open as safely as possible and follow all of the guidelines, and equally important to promote that message to the residents of Saratoga County and those outside of Saratoga County who might want to visit those businesses. The message of safety will be a highlight in the promotional campaign, should the Board of Supervisors decide to fund it. Mr. Lawler reiterated that this would be discussed at the committee level. The request for funding will be brought through the normal committee process, presented at Economic Development, if approved there then present to Law & Finance and if approved there, it would go to the full Board for their deliberation and decision.

It was decided that the group would continue to meet weekly at this point. The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday June 4, 2020 at 3pm.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
Therese Connolly  
Deputy Clerk of the Board